

FOREIGN MISSIONS

ESSENTIAL TO THE

PROSPERITY OF THE CHURCH AT HOME.

A PAPER READ AT THE

SECOND CLERICAL CONFERENCE OF THE DIOCESE OF HURON,

CANADA.

BY

REV. CHA'S. R. MATTHEW, B.A.

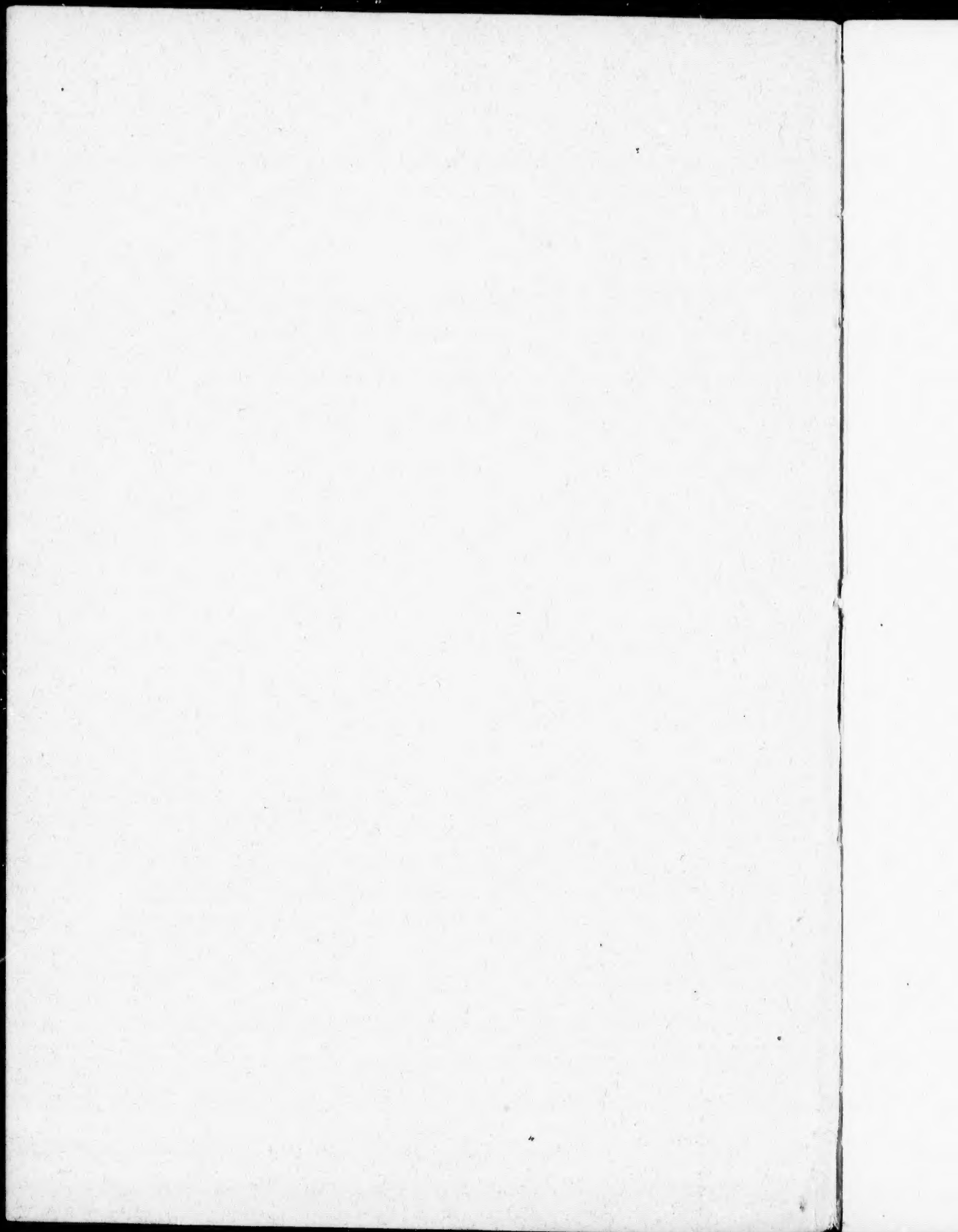
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THIS fourth question, invites us for a brief space to concentrate our thoughts upon a topic, perhaps the most essential, of all those which can engage the intellect or animate the heart of a servant of Jesus Christ. It calls us to a standpoint, whence, overlooking for a time the narrow bounds of diocesan and home affairs, we shall survey the great surrounding world fields, and consider some aspects at least of the missionary tie which links or should link us together. I thank God that amid the varied subjects which have been proposed for our brotherly discussion, this, of most weighty and abiding interest to the Church of Christ, has not been passed over.

The theme before us is "Foreign Missions essential to the prosperity of the Church at home."

As I understand this affirmation—it recognizes a distinction between the existence of a church, and its *prosperous* existence. And while it declares an engagement in mission work needful to its prosperity, it does not venture to pronounce such absolutely essential to its being. No doubt a visible Church of Christ exists, as our article holds, wherever the Word and the Sacraments are ministered to Christian men. But it may be a church cold-hearted and declining

wherein "many are sickly, and many sleep." Such the condition of our own communion through many a decade of bygone years ; when sunk in worldliness or withering amid the forms of a dry orthodoxy, the vital flame burned low. To such we dare not indeed deny the title of a church ; but our affirmation is that, to a church's healthful vigorous life, to a church's full and true prosperity, foreign missions are a necessity.

But before we can fairly enter upon the discussion suggested, we must deal with a subordinate question, a just conception of which will be found materially helpful in understanding the main subject. The question is this—What is that "prosperity" to which the church's engagement in "Foreign Missions" is declared to be "essential?" Is it an outward visible prosperity, or, is it inward and spiritual? Is it the multiplication of schools, parsonages and places of worship, or, is it an access of "love and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost?" Mainly, I apprehend, the latter. The former only in a secondary and subordinate sense, and as dependent upon this. It is that which St. John describes as "the soul's prospering and being in health,"—that which so often freighted the prayers of apostolic lips—the "multiplication of grace and peace of faith and love in the Church of Jesus Christ." It is an increasing unity of purpose and a deepening peace of conscience with God. It is a more abounding prayerfulness, and a quickening of the graces and gifts of the Lord's people. These things surely constitute the real prosperity of the church. And if we find that the Foreign Mission work directly stimulates and promotes these blessed ends in a manner and a measure not otherwise attained, we must, I think, acknowledge that in that work lies an element essential to the true prosperity of the flock of Christ. I shall endeavor, then, in this paper to show that engagement in that work contributes essentially and directly to the furtherance of these ends.

I. It leads to unity of purpose with God. Whatever our various views of the purport of unfulfilled prophecy, I believe that all earnest students of Holy Writ are agreed that the

dispensation under which we live is divinely intended to be one of great blessing to the whole world. Unlike the earlier and local economies, it is not to be confined as a channel of spiritual benefit to place or race. The Saviour, whose grace and goodness are its central truth and teaching, is to be a light to lighten the Gentiles no less than the glory of Israel. The Sun of Righteousness is, indeed, to rise upon Judea's purple hills, but his far extending meridian splendors nor Lebanon, nor snowy Hermon shall confine. His way is to become known upon earth his saving health among all nations. The one grand and gracious intent of the Father's gift and the Saviour's suffering and sacrifice that Messiah's beneficent sway may extend to every sin-stricken shore—that the heathen may become His inheritance, earth's utmost parts His possession.

Now, the work of Missions, directed immediately it may be, to the sins, sorrows and degradations of myriads, ultimately aims at this glory and triumph of the Divine Saviour. It not only expands the heart with the noblest philanthropy but elevates it with the loftiest of aims. It does not mean merely sound morality for Chinese Confucians, nor true knowledge for Indian philosophers, nor true worship for African fetichists, nor settled civilization for America's roving braves, nor brotherly affection among New Zealand savages, —although it means all this. Divine wisdom and goodness have inseparably woven each and every of these beneficent results into the mission work. But its truest end lies beyond, its supremest aim far above all these things. Intelligently entered on it lifts man's will to the plane of the Divine. It exalts his intentions to the level of God's volitions. It makes his aims run parallel with those of the merciful Saviour. In intent or extent he becomes satisfied with nothing lesser, nothing lower than that which the word and the will of God hold out before him, the glory of Christ in the blessing of earth's farthest tribes. Thus his purposes are led to flow in the channel of the Divine purposes, to issue ultimately in the ocean of the Divine glory.

Now blot out the mission work from the hearts of Christian

men. Let each church be content with looking after its own immediate interests ; and who does not see that the harmony between the hearts (if we may so speak) of God and of His people is destroyed ? The aims of the Master and the servants differ. The eternal will and purpose are crossed by the selfishness of man. And while this disharmony continues, it is difficult to comprehend how prosperity of churches or Christians can be.

The church's *peace of conscience* must largely depend on her active engagement in mission work.

Bear in mind that the reference here is not to home missions. They may well be regarded as the lowest duty of a Christian church. "If any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel."

But the question before us is concerning a wider claim. Not only has the Lord revealed His eternal purpose to bless the *world* with the knowledge of Christ, it has pleased Him also to invite, nay, more, to command the co-operation of His people to that end. His church, while making it her primary care to build herself up in faith and purity as a structure of living stones, acceptable to Him, is also bidden to extend her boundaries and never cease until she has occupied the whole world in her Lord's name. The great command, so familiar, and yet so little laid to heart, addressed by Christ to His Apostles on the eve of His ascension, will not cease to be in force until its object has been fully accomplished. His words, "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature," will stand on the great Statute Book as the expression of His will to all the whole church on earth to the end of time ; for the promise annexed to it stretches on from the days of the Apostles' labors through all succeeding ages—"Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." And the commission directly entrusted to St. Paul by his Divine Master was significant of more than the work of any one man's life, as it was also a reiteration of the will of God regarding the duty of the Christian to the heathen : "Rise and stand upon thy feet, for I have appeared unto thee for

this purpose; to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom I now send thee, to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith which is in Me." A direction thus given to his whole subsequent life, Paul ever after felt himself debtor, both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians, both to the wise and the unwise; and the like debt will rest upon the Christian Church until it is fully paid.*

There can be no question, then, but that the will of the Lord in this matter has been clearly revealed.

It is equally plain that His Church to-day is sufficiently cognizant of the fact of its bearing on direct duty. Not always was it thus. There was a time, removed from us by the space of only three or four generations, when the Church of Christ seemed not awake to the practical bearing of these great commands. Missionaries had indeed gone forth earlier to seek the heathen. But their work was mostly individual and isolated. They were solitary stars in a midnight sky. On the Church of those days it had not dawned that the Lord's "Great Commission" referred to a work practicable in their age, and urged a practical and present duty.

When, in 1789, the celebrated William Carey, then in the opening of his great career, rose up in a gathering of Baptist ministers, at Northampton, to propose as a subject for clerical discussion, "The duty of the Christian Church to attempt the evangelization of the heathen," an old, and, we may add, a *pious* divine, sprang to his feet and thundered out "young man, sit down! when God pleases to convert the heathen, he will do it without your aid or mine." In 1796 the proposition to establish a foreign mission was treated by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland as "an unnatural and revolutionary design."† And the feeling of our own Church

* Charge of the Archdeacon of Worcester.

† Anderson's "Foreign Missions."

in the matter may be inferred from the fact that, previous to the present century, no English clergyman had ever been sent out as a missionary to the heathen.

Now all this is changed. The command to preach the Gospel to every creature under heaven is acknowledged to refer to present and pressing duty. And it cannot be neglected without sin. In times of men's ignorance God winked at this neglect. But now nor church nor churchman can possess God's peace or enjoy a comfortable hope of heaven, while from love of ease or greed of gain doing little or naught to extend Christ's kingdom. "Such a course might have been safe in the days of Baxter and Ken, or in the days of our grandfathers," but it would be ruinous to all inner peace now. The mission work, then, contributes essentially to the maintenance of that peace with God, which can be found only in the discharge of acknowledged duty.

III. Turn we now in the third place to that side of the Church's prosperity which consists in the stimulation and development of the Christian life in the Church itself. Not unduly to extend the limits of this paper, I would ask you simply to note how largely this work has *quickened in the Church that trinity of Christian graces—"faith, hope, and charity."*

1. It has greatly strengthened our *faith* in the supernatural origin and truth of our religion. With the first conquests of the Gospel that earliest Missionary Record, the book of the Acts, has made us familiar. In the hands of Apostles and apostolic men we have seen the Word victorious in many a conflict with Jewish Ecclesiasticism, Greek philosophy and Roman power, until in a few generations it planted the peaceable banner of Christ upon the imperial throne of the Cæsars.

But for centuries this mighty weapon remained well-nigh unused. And at the outset of this later era of missionary effort, doubtless many a heart, both of those who went forth and those who by prayers and gifts and sympathy strengthened their hands in God, must have asked at times,—especially in the long delays which accompanied the infancy of

some of the missions—"Shall the Gospel prove a power as mighty, shall it wield an influence as universal, as in the days of old?" Thank God seventy years of missionary travail have settled that question. It is estimated by those most competent to judge, that at the close of the first Christian century not more than one million souls acknowledged the Christian name. The one million three hundred thousand won during the present age from heathen darkness to Christian light and life, out of almost every nation under heaven, the many marvellous Gospel triumphs in Sierra Leone and Madagascar, in New Zealand, India and the Isles of the sea, prove the universal adaptation of the Christian religion to the needs and its mighty power over the souls of men of every tongue and tribe.—And this is no small gain in a day when one professor, learned in the wisdom of this world, would shear away the supernaturalness and universality which are the glory of our faith, to leave us Christianity simply a religion among religions, while another not less renowned is inviting us to substitute for the Gospel of atonement a gospel of atoms.

Often when apparently the work of God has stood still, the Church at home has found her faith quickened by tidings of success abroad, trust in the unfailing power of the Unseen has been deepened, and despondency has yielded to new kindling energies in the Master's cause. And the oneness of the religious experience developed in men of every variety of race and training, with that which the pastor and the pious Christian laborer meet in their home field powerfully tends to the confirmation of our confidence in the reality and divine origin of the religion of Jesus Christ.

2. Once more—the mission work largely calls forth *the patience of hope*. The history of many of the most successful of modern missions is a story of labor drawn out through years of discouraging and apparently useless effort. Take as an example the remarkable mission of that remarkable man, John Evangelist Gössner, to the Kohls or devil-worshippers of Chota Nagpore. In 1845, he sent forth his laborers with the simple instructions, believe, love, hope, pray,

burn, waken the dead, hold fast by prayer, wrestle like Jacob. Up, up, my brethren, the Lord is coming, and to every one He will say, "Where hast thou left the souls of those heathen? Oh! swiftly seek these souls and enter not without them into the presence of the Lord." Yet though going forth in a spirit truly apostolic their work long seemed in vain. Death thinned their slender ranks. Their schools had a struggle to exist. Did they set out to preach the Gospel in the villages around, the Kohls remained studiously away. Not even could they be drawn to conversation on religious things. Their prospects long continued of the gloomiest. Yet through private sorrows and disappointed expectations they held on. Without a visible sign of success, against ordinary rules, against their own misgivings, for six long weary years they hoped against hope. Then the Lord himself kindled a fire before their eyes. It seized not only single souls but spread from village to village. From every side the question was borne to them, "What shall we do?" "How shall we be saved?" until, from that sowing in heartsick tears of hope deferred has resulted a wondrous harvest. To-day a thousand villages in that district are sanctified by the presence of Christian families where there is social and family prayer, and where the elder converts are daily instructing the younger in the unsearchable riches of Christ.

The same state of affairs accompanied the planting of the Gospel in Tahiti, where, for well-nigh a score of years, the missionaries labored without a single convert: and of New Zealand where our own agents, unprotected by human arm amid a population of ferocious cannibals, held on for eleven years to gather one soul, and where five years more elapsed before another was baptized. Similar the record of many a mission whose later years have been as glorious as those already noted.

Now, it is impossible to estimate the benefit conferred on the church by the discipline enforced by these and kindred causes. The shutting of doors once open, the sudden removal of men of noblest promise, the declension of converts, the staying of the work amid the first fruits of success. How all

these things, throwing God's people back on sure promises and plain duty, have tried, and by trying, strengthened their patience and drawn out and exercised their Christian hope, we may not more largely relate.

But in connection with this point we must not fail to note that missions have thus quickened the church's vital breath. These trials of patience have moved thousands to prayer. The presence of sore disappointments and delayed hopes has forced the church upon her knees. Great interests and great needs, have led to great searchings of heart and great wrestlings like Jacob's. Thus life, earnestness, animation, have been lent to the intercessions of many a public assembly, many a private closet, many a family altar. To take but two illustrations. Who remembers the Abyssinian war, will recall the heartiness which it conferred upon the response to that touching petition of our Litany: "That it may please Thee to have pity upon all prisoners and captives." Then the annually recurring seasons of prayer for missions, now, let us hope an established institution in our own and other churches have largely contributed to spiritual prosperity. For a praying church is ever a prospering church. That which cultivates a spirit of supplication is eminently helpful to the inner life. And to this great duty the mission work confessedly leads. It is not more a work of labor than of prayer. Its foundation was laid in prayer. "Ask of Me and I will give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance." When the harvest agency is lacking we are to "*pray* the Lord of the Harvest." And when in distant climes the work stands still though earnest laborers preach and plead, we must cry "Come forth O! breath!"

3. The mission work not only confirms faith, and strengthens hope, it largely increases the *charity* of the Church.

It widens and deepens our sympathies as nothing else can; realizing in the highest sense the old heathen saying "nihil humanem alienum a me puto." Side by side it draws out zeal for God and love to man. Raising us out of national isolation, it brings us to regard men of all races and tribes as brethren made of one blood, offspring of one great Father,

redeemed by the death of one precious Saviour. It would beget in us a charity, which, overleaping the narrow barriers of tongue, color, clime, shall embrace in its enlarged sympathy, the embruted negro, the proud Brahmin, the South Sea cannibal, the stolid Indian—men of all grades of civilization and culture, and engage for them loving efforts and earnest prayers. Especially does it enlist our profound compassions for the social degradation of her, whose redeemed position encircled with all the attributes of loving regard as maiden, wife, and mother, sheds such a tender grace over our modern Christian society.

But more, this mission work elicits and cultivates our respectful affection for those of other churches who are fellow-laborers in this great undertaking, enlarging thus the communion of the saints. We cannot close our eyes to the great and good work which Christians of other names have been enabled under God to do. The history of missions is a standing rebuke to that spirit which refuses to see the Church of Christ outside its own narrow shell. Neither great missions nor great missionaries are the exclusive property of any one branch of the church. In the distribution of missionary zeal and success the great Head of the Church divideth unto each severally as He will. Accordingly we find that in Madagascar He has especially prospered the Congregationalists, in Asia Minor, the Presbyterians, in Fiji the Wesleyan, in Sierra Leone and New Zealand, the Church of England. And turning to that which is the great common ground of missionary toil, we find by the testimony of Bishop Cotton of Calcutta, that "the most conspicuous triumphs of the Gospel in India are those of our own Church in Tinnevely, of the Lutheran Pastor Gössner in Chota Nagpore, of Judson and his American brethren among the Karens in Burmah." Gather the names of those eminent for missionary zeal, devotion and success,—Hans Egede, Christian David, Eliot Brainerd, Schwartz, Carey, Morrisén, Martyn, Marsden, Moffatt, Williams, Duff, Pattesen, Livingstone—and you have a list equally Catholic. And shall we "forbid" these other brethren? Shall we regard their labors with cold indifference?

Shall we wish their work undone? Have we learned nothing from them? Have we not been stirred by their example? Has not their brotherly intercourse cheered, and their holy zeal profited our brethren in far off lands? Can we do otherwise than wish them God speed, and say, "Though ye follow not with us, the Lord prosper you, we wish you good luck in the name of the Lord."*

But there is another sense in which the Foreign Mission work has essentially enlarged the Church's charity. I mean in the sense of bountifulness. In the year 1790, it may fairly be estimated that the gifts of English Christians toward the evangelization of the heathen world would not reach \$50,000. To-day they exceed \$5,000,000 annually. True this is not a tithe of what it should be, considering the vastness of the nation's wealth and the mournful fact that yearly she squanders on intoxicating drinks \$350,000,000, a sum equal to the whole revenue of the empire. The contributions to the mission work represent but a "few sweepings of the peoples' gold dust." But they exhibit a grand advance upon the insignificant gifts of eighty years ago. And the reports of our great missionary societies reveal the hopeful fact that the missionary cause has developed and nurtured in men of wealth and sons of toil, in all classes of society and all ages, the grace of Christian bountifulness.

Thus we have seen the Church internally quickened and prospered by the reflex influence of Foreign Missions. But while our contention has been that this was the direct and primary influence of the work, we are far from holding that it ceased here.

Naturally and necessarily it went on to produce outward prosperity in the home church. Externally as internally "he that watered was watered also himself." The history of our now numerous societies for church work shows thus. The very dates of these institutions have a marked significance. Putting aside the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, founded in the latter part of the 17th, and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, at the beginning of

* Ps. cxxix. 8 Prayer Book Version.

the 18th centuries, the Church Missionary Society dates from 1799, the Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews, 1809, Church Building Society, 1811, Pastoral Aid Society, 1836, Additional Curates Society, 1837. And now in the list the societies and the contributions for the home work greatly predominate.*

And if any still doubts the essential connection between mission work and the Church's welfare, let him compare the low state of our own Church before she entered upon that work, with her present prosperity. By the very putting forth of her energies to bless the outside world, her own vitality was increased, and every bounding pulse of life was quickened in her veins. Thus has the weary traveller amid Arctic snows reanimated his own stiffening frame in reviving a perishing brother.

* Canon Miller's sermon before the Islington Clerical Meeting.

